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AUTHOR Laughlin, Margaret A.
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ABSTRACT

In formulating an official language policy, a country must consider cultural, social, political and economic factors. Alternative policies on language instruction can be categorized into three groups: 1) subordination of the home language to the country's dominant language; 2) bilingual maintenance through the simultaneous provision of instruction in two languages; and 3) use of the home language in the early school years and the dominant language in later years. In the United States, Belgium, and the Philippines, cultural and political influences have led to conflicts concerning language policy. Current policy in the United States emphasizes transitional bilingual education and the eventual phasing out of the child's home language, but some advocates believe that transitional bilingual programs must lead to language maintenance programs and that the linguistic competencies of native speakers must be encouraged. In Belgium, policies to achieve equality of language use and instruction (among three language groups) have failed due to social changes and public attitudes: democratization in language choice and linguistic polarization prevail. In the Philippines, the linguistic issue is complicated by attempts to develop a national language, and by conflicting interests in Spanish, English, and the many native languages: the government currently supports bilingualism in English and Pilipino. Each nation needs to develop a consistent language policy in order to avoid semilinguistic literacy, promote academic achievement, and develop national unity. (Author/MJL)

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A POLITICAL FOCUS ON ISSUES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION: COMPARATIVE VIEWS FROM SELECTED COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

by

Margaret A. Laughlin
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

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of the National Association of
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A POLITICAL FOCUS ON ISSUES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION: COMPARATIVE VIEWS FROM SELECTED COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

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Is it an equity for one culture or language to be destroyed and for another culture or language to be maintained? Joshua Fishman quoted in Bilingual Education: A Necessity or A Luxury? Vuong G. Thuy, 1979.

The formulation of an official language education policy, based in part on political considerations, is a most critical and controversial one facing many people and nations. Plans to establish a language education policy should proceed with caution since such a policy impinges on historically held cultural values. In order to establish an official language education policy consideration must be given to national historical development, patriotism, economic concerns, social values, and personal attitudes. The development of such a language policy needs to include provisions related to literacy and to make explicit rights of divergent language groups (Heath, 1978:64). Societies, large and small, have had to respond to two fundamental questions, "What language of instruction will be used in the schools?" and "Can language be used to develop understanding, respect, and tolerance among people and nations?" The responses to these questions are complex, emotional, and tension filled. There are no simple responses.

Language has come to represent more than words. Language is a collection of symbols which convey meaning. It is a human form of communication which is an innate characteristic in all human beings who have the ability to acquire sounds for words. Language serves a double function either by bringing members of ethnic groups closer together (assimilation) or by shutting out members representing other ethnic groups (separatism). For example, language is associated with the development of modern technological culture and improved socio-economic benefits for society. At the same time, language threatens the existence of the individual, challenges long held social values and political structures, and is associated with the destruction of the environment.

In general, past language policies could be categorized into two groupings. For example, one language policy approach required newcomers to a nation, society or culture to give up their linguistic and ethnic identity, become indistinguishable and assimilated into the larger society.[1] Children entering the educational system were expected to switch language usage from that of their first language (probably the language of the home or mother tongue) into the language used by the school for instruction. From the perspective of the dominant language groups, linguistic change erodes former loyalties and promotes assimilation.

A second language policy approach is for the linguistic or ethnic group to remain identifiable within the larger community. This policy has brought about the implementation of "bilingual maintenance" programs, whereby instruction is provided in two languages so that first language skills are retained and academic learning takes place using two languages.

There seems to be a third language education policy approach which attempts to include the best characteristics of the two positions. According to E.G. Lewis,

> *bilingual education is only partly, and to my way of thinking only secondarily, concerned with simple maintenance and conservation. If it is to be worth anything, it needs to make certain that out of the discrete cultural elements a new unity is born (Lewis, 1980: xiv).*

Lewis' studies have identified a theoretical base to help to develop and to understand some of the issues involved in formulating a coherent bilingual education policy.

Language education policies extend beyond national boundaries and have international implications and possible consequences. Switzerland experiences political and social harmony with its diversified linguistic population, while the fabric of Indian society is torn asunder with linguistic conflict. The attempt to make Hindi India's national language encountered severe obstacles because of ethnic loyalties and attachment to other languages. On the other hand, the Peoples Republic of China and the Soviet Union,

1. One exception to this language policy was the policy of the European colonial powers which forced colonial people to learn the language of the mother country, e.g., French, English or Spanish.

both large countries with many diverse language groups, have as official policies maintenance of regional languages. Belgium, which will be discussed in greater depth, is faced with the issue of language equality or linguistic inequality. Examples from three nations (United States, Belgium and the Philippines) facing questions related to language education policies will be examined within a political frame of reference.

Linguistic diversity within clans, tribes, nationalities, and nations is closely related to the concept of heterogeneity. Linz and Miguel (1975) have identified eight separate but interrelated aspects of heterogeneity. Ethnic groups may vary because of (1) economic achievement; (2) social structure; (3) availability and quality of education; (4) cultural practices and traditions; (5) religious differences; (6) degree of political participation; (7) differences in values, norms and personality traits; and (8) variations in patterns of family life. Tension between and among these conflicting forces compete among themselves and influence the political decision making processes in the formulation of language education policies. Groups maintaining their own language are viewed as a potential threat to national security.

Deutsch (1966:7) suggests several variables within society which need to be examined. These variables may decline or intensify within and between linguistic and ethnic groups and need to be considered. Lewis identified these variables to include (1) settings (historical, institutional, behavioral, external and community-type), and (2) population mobility (nomadic, seasonal migration, voluntary and involuntary migration, and commuting). Policy makers grappling with the formulation of language education policies need to be cognizant of these variables and tensions. Even if linguistic political equality is acheived, seldom is social, economic, or cultural equality achieved.

Bilingual Education in the United States

In the United States the political processes of establishing and implementing a language education policy are influenced by aspects of heterogeneity identified by Linz and Miguel and the variables identified by Lewis. At the same time policy makers are also influenced by national and international events, and the needed interface between the

three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) at the national, state, and local levels. Until the rather turbulent decade of the 1960s, the United States motto E pluribus unum (one out of many) conveyed the idea of assimilation and conformity to one lifestyle and one language. During the sixties, concern for justice, equality, and human dignity for the individual heightened and long held traditional values were questioned.

Ethnic groups surfaced and began to demand respect for and recognition of their heritage. It was political pressure in the southwest which motivated Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas to introduce what was to become known as Title VII of the "Bilingual Education Act" (1968) which was intended to "serve the needs of children of limited English-speaking ability" in order to equalize their educational opportunities (Brisk,1981:7). Congress, in 1972, passed the Ethnic Heritage Act which recognized cultural diversity. In 1974 and 1978, ESEA was extended to serve a larger population base and funds were appropriated. The federal efforts generated numerous state legislative laws as well. Local educational agencies adopted new policies or adapted existing policies to meet the federal guidelines related to language education policies. These laws for the most part were compensatory in nature.

Schools not providing equality of educational opportunity were determined to be in violation of Section 601 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act based on the Lau v. Nicholas case (1974) which ruled the San Francisco School District failed to provide adequately for Chinese speaking students in the school system. The court ruling applied to all school districts. The fundamental issue raised in this case was "What is equal educational opportunity?" Subsequent court cases Serna v. Portales Municipal Schools and Aspira of New York, Inc. v. Board of Education of the City of New York have resulted in court mandated bilingual programs (Grant and Goldsmith, 1979).

The following year the Office of Civil Rights (1975) issued a memorandum which came to be known as the "Lau Remedies." This document indicated bilingual education was

one way to meet the Lau mandate to provide for equality of educational opportunity.

Bilingual education in the United States has been defined as:

> *... the use of two languages, one of which is English as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well organized program which encompasses all or part of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures (U.S. Office of Education, 1971:1).*

According to Blanco (1978:462), many researchers conclude the thrust of bilingual education is:

> *not to teach language per se but rather to provide students with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills through the language they know best while at the same time adding English to their repertoire... it is felt the primary goal of bilingual education is to allow children of limited English speaking ability to participate successfully in the educational process.*

Others (UNESCO, 1955) are convinced that use of the native language (mother tongue) is the best language for instruction and will enhance a child's self-image and esteem for his/her own culture. Knowledge of a language and culture are interwoven and are co-components of the instructional program. Cognitive and affective learning are greatly interrelated and receive the major thrust in bilingual education.

Language policy decisions based on political rather than education considerations have been made. For example, congressional recognition of centers of linguistically different language groups (potential voters) has provided a large number of programs federally funded in particular geographic areas, e.g., Spanish language programs in the southwest, New York, Chicago, Miami and Seattle. Other language programs with federal funding range from Arabic to Yup'ik. Both state and local educational agencies have responded with language education programs although data are not easy to obtain. At present due to the recent influx of large numbers of people arriving from Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) and from the Caribbean (Cuba and Haiti) has brought to the forefront once again questions concerning the language policies of the United States.

The need for federal funds for bilingual education has yet to develop a strong case for continued existence and to make a favorable impression on members of Congress and the executive branch. Some federal "seed money" allocated to local programs may not have been effective or used efficiently and so received unfavorable media attention. In an era of declining economic resources, taxpayers now examine the amount of money spent on education more critically and carefully. Programs which are controversial and believed to be undesirable and unnecessary are targeted for reduced allocations or elimination. A continued federal funding of bilingual education will be based in part on the reputation of earlier language education programs. Without federal funding local school districts may not be in a position to continue to finance a viable language education program. At the same time other sources of funding will be needed to continue bilingual education programs.

Not all agree with the purpose of the federal and state legislation which provides for transitional bilingual education during which time a child's home (mother tongue) language will be phased out. Sooner or later during this process, the child will come to learn that his/her home language is inferior and less desirable than the dominant language. There are advocates who believe transitional bilingual programs are just a beginning and that these must move into language maintenance programs in which language competency is viewed as a valuable national and human resource. The recent Perkins Report (1979) strongly supports the position that language skills are critical to national defense and to the nation for a variety of other political, economic, and cultural reasons. To date no federal funds have been allocated to implement the recommendations of the Perkins Report. It is ironic the United States is overlooking developing the linguistic competencies of native speakers (in fact discouraging use of native languages) at a time when proficiency in languages is needed. Here existing federal language education policy and recommendations for future such policies are at odds and in conflict. One can only speculate what the political and economic trade-offs will be.

Linguistic and cultural diversity should be seen as a strength rather than as a political liability to fragment the nation. There is nothing in bilingual education to diminish the importance of English as the current official language of the United States. There have been some mistaken beliefs that bilingual education benefits only non-white students. While additional research is needed on bilingual education, initial research efforts indicate that students in bilingual education programs benefit scholastically or that bilingual education itself is neutral (Blanco, 1978:499). If the language education policy of the United States is to continue to include bilingual education, existing programs need strengthening, new teaching materials need development, pre-service and in-service teacher training requires more attention, parents need to become involved in policy decision making at all levels. Meeting these needs takes economic resources and active engagement in the related political processes.

The Language Conflict in Belgium

The issue of language used for education in Belgium is a long standing political issue. Officially there are three language groups in Belgium: Flemish, French, and German. Since German language speakers include about 63,000 persons, constituting approximately .64% of the Belgian population (Bustamente, Overbeke and Verdoodt, 1978:4), major focus has been given to the French-Flemish language conflict. With an awakening sense of linguistic identity and pride, the Flemish majority have actively supported a separatist movement and have achieved sufficient political power to cause the Belgian government to recognize Flemish language on a parity with French language. One result of the struggle for linguistic parity has been the reorganization of the schools in Belgium. The language conflict has been especially volatile in Brussels, the capital city. Brussels is a predominantly French speaking city located geographically in the Flemish section of the nation.

Historically, Belgium has been a multilingual nation in practice although the French language has dominated. Parliamentary action in passing of the Language Law of July 14, 1932, identified four language zones. The four language zones are (1) Flemish, (2) French, (3) German, and (4) Brussels and its environs. In the first three zones, the language of instruction is Flemish, French and German respectively. Parents living within the Brussels zone are required to enroll their children in schools giving instruction in mother tongue or the language usually spoken in the home. The latter provision is symbolized by a belief in liberté du père de familie. Parliamentary enactment of this law attempted to ensure instruction in mother tongue throughout the country.

Passage of the Language Law of 1932 was a reactive legislative response in an effort to defuse the Flemish separatist threat. According to Swing (1980) the schools were to be used as a vehicle in order to achieve linguistic equilibrium, to preserve the culture and language of the Flemish population residing in Brussels, and to educate for bilingualism so as not to cause Flemish language erosion. Equality of language instruction and use was the intent.

While there were problems related to implementation of the law throughout the country, in Brussels the conflict had political, social, cultural, and economic consequences not necessarily felt elsewhere. Evidence gathered by Swing indicates the Language Law of 1932 did not succeed in producing linguistic equilibrium due, in part, to the structure of the schools, demographic shifts of population, parental evasion of the law, provisions allowing parents of bilingual children to attend schools in either language, and the subtle realization of bilingual children that French was in fact the dominant language.

National linguistic polarization remained a fact of life. For example, the intensity of the language conflict was manifest in student riots at the University of Louvain, several judicial cases testing the parameters of the national language laws, the Belgian linguistic case presented at the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg on behalf of 324 plaintiffs,[2] and delays in completing the third revision of the Belgian Constitution until a compromise solution could be formulated are evidence of polarization (Swing: 106). The intensity of the language issue interrupted the very fabric of Belgian life. Confrontation was evident; violence was a distinct possibility. Swing reports that for the most part the Belgian courts usually ruled in favor of the parents which in itself became a political issue. She also reports the plaintiffs in the Strasbourg Human Rights case (with one exception) lost their case when the court ruled Belgium did have the right to impose a territorial language.

Envorcement of the new Language Law of 1963 was fairly rigid for several years. Enforcement by school inspectors who tried to be objective and enforce the law as mandated became an additional source of tension and conflict. By 1971 the Flemish conceded that

2. The plaintiffs based their arguments on three points of international law contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. The plaintiffs argued (1) the Belgian government interferred with their private & family rights by not allowing the plaintiffs to have an opportunity for education in the mother tongue language in a nearby school; (2) the Belgian government discriminated against them on the basis of language preference; and (3) the Belgian government did not respect parents religious & philosophical convictions for raising their own children (Swing: 110).

they were unable to achieve language maintenance in Brussels schools by using coersive policies. After that date parents were allowed to enroll their children in the schools of their own choice. Linguistic integration was again legal. The same year the new Belgian Constitution was ratified. Brussels, however, was left fragmented based on linguistic and cultural identification.

Based on the Brussels political and linguistic conflict Swing's research suggest four lessons which may be useful for others to examine in formulating bilingual policies. Lesson one indicates "bilingual schools do not necessarily lead to language maintenance." Lesson two suggests that "democratization of a linguistic hierarchy is likely to bring demand for separate linguistic structures." Lesson three notes "a by-product of the democratization of linguistic function is a change in the kind of bilingualism found in a society where languages are in contact." Lesson four concludes that "use of language to reconstruct society may produce greater conflict than the conflict it was designed to eliminate." Wounds for the linguistic conflict in Belgium may well exist for years to come -- they cannot be eradicated by legislative mandate.

Toward Bilingualism: The Philippine Experience

With United States colonization of the Philippines came the decision to use English as the medium of instruction in the schools. Over a period of time the number of elementary school dropouts increased and subsequent research indicated these children reverted to illiteracy a few years after leaving school. It seemed obvious to some that the Filipino needed a national language in order to promote a sense of identity and to unite the numerous linguistic groups so as to provide a means of communication (Soriano, 1977:5).

The Philippine Educational Act of 1940 mandated the development of a national language using existing native languages, including Tagalog, as the basis for a national language. Various language development efforts were attempted. It should be kept in mind that in 1899 Spanish was the official language of the Philippines. This policy existed until 1935 when both Spanish and English were named official languages. Later Tagalog became an official language as well.

A survey of Philippine education reports "bilingualism in Pilipino and English is both a fact of Philippine national life today, as well as a desirable condition in the contemporary world" (Nebres, 1977:7). Competency in both languages would enable Filipinos to function in either language and its cultural milieu.

Efforts to determine the Philippine national language were a source of prolonged discussion in the 1971 Constitutional Convention for several reasons. Many of the delegates to the convention did not speak Tagalog and had campaigned either for a different national language or for the use of a local or regional vernacular. Compromise was eventually achieved by making provisions for a national language. The delegates, however, could not agree on a definite common national language. According to Article 15, the Philippine Constitution (1973) is to be promulgated in English and Pilipino, translated into Spanish, Arabic and dialects spoken by populations numbering over 50,000; efforts were to be made to develop and adopt a language known as Filipino; and unless otherwise provided by law English and Pilipino were declared official languages.

For the schools Pilipino was to be the main language of instruction in elementary schools with instruction in vernacular languages allowed in grades one and two. Pilipino and English were to be used for instruction in secondary schools and in higher education. While the 1973 Constitution makes no specific provision for bilingual instruction, by inference bilingual education seems to be encouraged. Some months later the National Education Board expressed support for developing bilingualism in Pilipino and English while recognizing the need to proceed to develop a national language called Filipino.

There exist a number of factors which complicate the linguistic issues in the Philippines. These include linguistic and cultural diversity; some Filipinos wish to retain Spanish, while others want to stress English and still others want to use their native vernacular as official languages. There is a need to develop a national language to unify the nation. Although the National Education Board supports the practice of bilingualism, there still exists questions related to which is the language of instruction. To what extent should the vernacular be used as the medium of instruction in the first two grades? Can a Filipino language be created from existing languages? Which language will serve the greatest practical good for the majority of the Philippine citizens? The issue has not been resolved and remains a source of conflict and controversy. Government policies have not been forthcoming.

Summary

This paper provided three examples of nations grappling with issues related to the development and implementation of official language policies and/or the determination of the language of instruction. It is imperative that appropriate recognition be given to the linguistic, ethnic, social, economic, cultural, and political settings in which policies are determined. The major area of disagreement is which language should be used for schooling in order to develop national literacy. Three alternative language education policies seem to be available: (1) subordination of mother tongue (first language) to the dominant language; (2) simultaneous teaching of mother tongue (first language) and the dominant language; or (3) use of mother tongue (first language) during the early school years and then shifting to the dominant language in later school years. The three nations discussed in this paper seem to favor the latter alternative as applied to its unique linguistic situation. A consistent language policy needs to be formulated by each nation to reduce the possibility of semilinguistic literacy; to promote cognitive and affective academic success of its citizens; and to develop a sense of national unity.

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